

Storing Eternal Treasures

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[0 : 00] Well, I've got good news for you because in today's passage, we're going to learn how to turn fake wealth into real riches. Yes, I'm going to show you how you can be really rich.

No hidden surprises, no catches. The Bible really does show us how to get rich, truly and exceedingly rich. So now that I've got everyone's attention, let's look at our passage for today.

We just finished last week where Jesus had given the disciples a lesson in how to deal with the pressure from the crowds and how to stand up for him as his disciples.

But now in verse 13, someone in the crowd said to him, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Talk about getting your priorities right.

Talk about actually taking what Jesus says to heart. But here we have an example of the problems the world is concerned with. They come to Jesus not to find true eternal joy, but to settle earthly and perhaps petty scores.

[1 : 10] Well, Jesus replied, man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you? And then he said, watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.

Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. So here's where we then have the reason for the parable Jesus is about to tell.

As I say, my outline, it's covetousness and greed and perhaps jealousy as well. And sadly, this is not uncommon, is it?

Often the death of a parent brings grief, but it also ignites sibling squabbles. Now, what did dad leave us on his will?

How is it he gets more than me? I looked after dad more while he was alive. Why didn't he leave me more? Sometimes we don't even wait for our parents to die.

[2 : 06] You might remember perhaps when your mom and dad came home from that big overseas business trip and they're handing out the souvenirs. Did you not instantly compare what your siblings got with you?

Why did they get a Hawaiian t-shirt while I only got boxer shorts? Well, there are many manifestations of greed, but it often shows itself as jealousy and covetousness.

It's really the flip side of greed. Same coin, greed on one side shows itself as jealousy or covetousness on the other. Of course, many a time we persuade ourselves that it's all about fairness.

Jesus is not fair the way the inheritance was divided. Fix it. Have you ever prayed such prayers? You know, when we felt that others are doing better than us, where we prayed, Lord, why?

Why me? Why have I only got this? What have I done to deserve this or that? Well, Jesus replied to both the man and his brother, I think the brother was actually there with him, was Kurt.

[3 : 20] Who made me an arbiter between you, he says. You see, Jesus had no desire to be feeding either man's greed. Instead, he wants to show them where true wealth lies.

And so he tells them to watch out. Be on guard against all kinds of greed. Not just the one that shows itself in jealousy, but all kinds of greed.

Naked ambition. Or worrying, which is what we get to in the next passage. Or constantly scheming to make more money. These are all manifestations of greed.

Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. Because life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Greed isn't good.

Having stuff doesn't make you rich. But we often think it does, don't we? That the more we have, the better off we are.

[4 : 24] The phrase, well off, that's exactly that assumption, isn't it? We're better off, we're well off, if we've got more stuff. But that's false.

And Jesus tells this parable to show us why. So let's look at this parable, verse 16. The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.

He thought to himself, what shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. And then he said, this is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I will store my surplus grain.

And I will say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, you fool.

This very night, your life will be demanded from you. Then, who will get what you have prepared for yourself? So here in this parable, we actually have a man who's already rich.

[5 : 28] He's not actually a poor man that happens to win the lottery. No, he's a rich man who's actually got more than enough. He has land to produce crops for him. And in this particular year, it produced a bumper crop.

More than he needed, which meant that he had a problem, actually. He had the problem to work out what to do with it. He had to fix this problem before he could relax. He's worried about where he'll store his newfound wealth.

For he says to himself, what shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. And it's exactly how our reading in Ecclesiastes says it would happen. In verse 12, which if, yep, thank you, Emma.

It says, the sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much. But as for the rich, the abundance permits them no sleep. So they're unable to sleep because they're constantly worrying about their wealth.

You see, once you've got something, you actually have to worry whether you're going to lose it or not. Have you ever owned a business or maybe had a job where the main measure of performance is how much money you make for the company?

[6 : 43] If you have, you know just how stressful it is. People in these positions will tell you that it's actually very hard to switch off, to find time for holidays.

And when they are on holidays, to truly be on holidays. They worry that everything they've spent their life building can just disappear if they turn their attention away from it or if they make a wrong business decision.

It can be the same too if you've won money in a lottery. So I googled up a few stories this week and I found, there are many stories actually, this is just one of them, I found Roger and Lyra Griffiths.

A picture of them, of her maybe, yes. In 2005, they won 1.8 million pounds in the UK and they splurged out on a mansion, a Porsche, and quite a few overseas trips.

But within five years, they've lost everything. Their uninsured mansion burned down. You can afford to buy a mansion, but you can't afford to insure it. And soon after, their 14-year marriage ended because Roger was interested in another woman.

[7:56] And the thing is, they actually said that before their fortune, before they won the lottery, they had reportedly never argued. Wealth brings with it worries, doesn't it?

And this was the problem with the rich man. But he decides to spend some of his wealth in order to store some of his wealth. So he'll tear down his existing barns and build bigger ones to store his harvest.

Now, in one sense, there's nothing wrong with that. If you've ever received a windfall, you need to look after it, right? You don't just squander it or leave it to rot. So that's not really this rich man's error.

Instead, his problem is seen in what he says to himself, if you look there. He says, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry.

And I think sometimes, if we are honest, we probably think like that as well, don't we? I think, if only I've paid off my mortgage, if only I have five million in my super accounts, or if only I've got a large inheritance from my grandparents, then life would be set.

[9:11] There's actually even a movement in the US that's dedicated to this. It's called the FIRE Movement, F-I-R-E. Have anyone heard of it? Jeff has.

He's been researching. It stands for Financial Independence Retire Early. And the aim is, what these people do, is that when they start work in the first five to ten years, they save 95% of their income so that they can retire by the time they're 35.

Well, that's what this man was probably thinking, that he's got enough to last him for years to come. He can retire early, sit back, and relax. And again, if you talk to your average Australian, that's probably how they think.

That's probably their main aim in life, to be financially secure so as to retire and enjoy life. So that they can go on a cruise one week, spend the next golfing, make a booking at that fancy restaurant or winery, get yourself a season ticket at the AFL.

We could all get used to that kind of life, couldn't we? But if you're a Christian and you love Jesus and God, then Jesus says here that that's actually a very dangerous thing to aim for.

[10:41] Why? Because these material things have a way of coming between you and God. How? Well, because when you look to your wealth for security, then you no longer look to God, do you?

So yes, there are rich people who still depend on God, but the temptation not to is very great. That's why there's a verse in Proverbs 30 and verse 7, which I've got on the screen.

It's actually a prayer. Have you got that, Emma? And the prayer is this, give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, who is the Lord? Or I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God. It's actually a very, very wise prayer, isn't it?

Not to be given too much, just enough so that we know that God cares for us, and yet, not too much, or else, we start to trust our wealth instead of God.

[11:51] I guess the thing, though, is, who of us actually have the courage to pray like that instead of just praying, Lord, give me more? Also, let's not fool ourselves into thinking that we can trust God only for our salvation.

So we say, yep, we trust in Jesus for our sins to be forgiven because He died for it, died for our sins, but then, we rely on our own strength, when it comes to building our wealth or our assets.

There's no such distinction, is there? If God is truly God, then we trust Him for everything. Every minute and second of our lives are in His hands anyway.

Every breath we take, let alone the food we eat, the clothes we wear, or the shelter that we live in, we enjoy only because God has provided it. And so that's why death is such a rude awakening for this rich man.

This man is a fool because God can demand his life at any time. And when God does, this man wakes up and realizes just how poor he is.

[12:59] All the barns he has, all the stores of harvest are useless, totally useless in eternity. Now, most of you have probably forgotten your Monopoly money.

Still hanging on to it tightly maybe? No. You are. Okay. Well, the thing is, many of you will know this, it's useless, isn't it? Most of you know that.

You probably crumpled it and nearly thrown it away because it can't make you rich except when you're playing Monopoly. But you see, that's actually true with our Australian dollars as well.

If you're thinking of making it to heaven one day, then whatever material wealth you have now is going to be useless there. You really can't take it with you.

But the Bible tells us how we can be rich in heaven to even convert some of the material wealth we have now to truly build wealth in heaven. Just like with this Monopoly money which Josh gave to me and I gave him some Australian dollars, you can invest some of your Australian dollars now to reap eternal gain in the life to come.

[14:13] And so the question you may ask is how can we do that? That was my promise at the start that I'll give you a sermon on how to be really rich. Well, the first thing to know is that if you want to be rich in heaven then you have to be rich toward God.

So the last verse Jesus tells that to us in his warning. He says, this is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.

So as I put it in my outline, you're rich when you have God. But we only have God if we treat him as God. That is, when we treat him as someone we depend on not just for our physical life but for our spiritual life.

We have God when we acknowledge him as our creator and his son as our savior. So being rich with God begins with that.

If you're still chasing after wealth to make you secure in this life and perhaps even next then you are like this rich fool. The only way to be rich toward God is to have faith in Jesus.

[15:16] And our ongoing relationship with God continues with that having faith in Jesus. And as we've seen over the last few weeks faith in Jesus translates into obedience to his word submitting to the spirit who teaches us his word and helps us to obey it.

All of which cultivates dependence on God and reliance on him for all things including for our salvation. But here in this passage because Jesus is responding to this man about his inheritance Jesus specifically addresses the way our pursuit of worldly things and our attachment to them erodes trust in God and distracts us from faith in him.

And at a very practical level building wealth is time consuming it takes up a lot of energy and that's why it takes us away from God. We want to get a job promotion well we just have to put in more hours at work or we have to study long hours to gain that qualification that will get us that next step in our promotion.

Now it doesn't mean that we can never pursue any of these things but we need to be careful of the dangers and temptations that it will draw us away from God. We need to check our motives before we embark on these things.

But at a spiritual level whenever we have more things it's just so easy isn't it to look to these things rather than to God for our dependence. It's actually very hard to strengthen our faith when it's not being tested.

[16 : 54] So faith is actually like a muscle. Some of you I know do body building and training and all sorts of things. You do know that you can't get muscles just by eating protein shakes right?

You actually have to lift the weights and do those running or swimming or whatever right? You actually need to work those muscles in order to build strength and endurance. And that's the same with our faith.

If we're never tested because we have all that we need then it's actually very hard for our faith to grow strong. Likewise money and material stuff trick us into thinking that we don't need to rely on God.

So how do we actually practice relying on God if we have stuff? Well if you look at my outline I offer you two things. First we are to learn contentment.

So Paul says in 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 6 that godliness with contentment is great gain. Every time we actively tell ourselves to be contented and we thank God for what he's given us especially when we feel we should be having more we should be entitled to more if in spite of that feeling we tell ourselves to be thankful and contented then we flex our faith muscle and grow richer toward God.

[18 : 16] it's a reminder that we are dependent on him and every time we do that we sort of make a deposit if you like in our heavenly bank account because we're growing in faith.

So boys and girls those of you still in school are your friends having a better holiday this term than you are? Flying off to Disneyland well all your parents are going to do is take you to Phillip Island.

Be thankful for your holiday anyway or have their parents bought them the latest iPhone and you only have mom's hand-me-down flip phone.

Be contented anyway. Actively say to yourself don't complain about what we do have but thank God for what we have been given.

Now as for us grown-ups does someone at church live in a better house than you do or in a better location? Do they have a better job? Have they got richer parents?

[19 : 25] Practice contentment. Thank God for what you do have. And if you're worried that you don't have enough and we'll talk more about that next time but for now then see that as an opportunity as well to depend on God.

to remind yourself that he's able to provide for all that we need and more. Because contentment means telling ourselves that God will often give us just enough at just the right time so that we might be rich in faith toward him.

Believe it or not when God tests us like that he's actually doing it for our own good. He's trying to build our faith and make us rich toward him.

Well secondly we can be rich toward God by practicing generosity. That is let's find ways to be generous even when we think we're not as well off as others. And that takes it one step further to be contented and be thankful that's great but when we're generous we actually put our money where our mouths are so to speak.

So we help others in need even if it disadvantages us. And if you think that's a big leap of faith then let me encourage you to start small and as your trust in God grows then you can do more and take bigger steps of faith.

[20 : 48] And here let me specifically urge you to be generous with gospel ministry because when you support gospel workers you're not only helping people in this life you're actually helping them for eternity as well if they come to faith in Jesus.

They are literally the eternal treasures that you're going to have fellowship with when you get to heaven. So those who work for Christian Union for missionaries those who work at City Bible Forum be generous to them.

I do know for a fact that some of them actually work more than they are paid because they cannot raise the support they need. They do it because of the harvest field. So let's be generous to them.

And when we're stretched in our generosity we benefit as well because we learn to trust God and then we grow rich toward him. It's a funny thing isn't it because we're always told that our aim should be to be financially secure.

But actually if you think about what the Bible says we actually don't want to be financially secure because when you're financially secure whether you're a retiree or someone still working paying off your mortgage you're secure in your finances you actually don't end up testing your faith and trusting in God.

[22:06] So it's actually good to be living on that edge isn't it? To still be trusting God because if we don't trust him we need to trust him in order for him to provide.

I know it's a balance. I'm not saying just go out there and whatever you've got just give all of it away. but it's worth asking that question isn't it? How do we live in such a way that we continue to trust in God and not in our savings or our finances because that's when we truly store eternal treasures.

Now friends as I conclude I just want to say that I'm not saying any of these things with any sense of judgment. I don't know your situation. Doesn't mean you're rich that means you're greedy and not generous.

By the same token it doesn't mean you're poor. That means you're not greedy either. Only God knows our hearts and I guess what I'm asking is for each of us to check our own hearts and lives today and to be honest and I have to do the same thing as well.

Are we guarding ourselves against all kinds of greed? And that's a serious question with serious consequences because if we end up on the day we die not being rich toward God it's too light.

[23:24] It's too light. So are we contented? Are we generous? These are questions worth asking honestly. But at the end of the day if we truly understand what this if we truly know what this truly this heavenly riches truly is that awaits us then actually you know we will pursue it with all the passion that we've got wouldn't we?

Just as the world pursues earthly riches we would be pursuing heavenly riches with all our might. We want to invest as much of our worldly wealth now in order to gain that eternal riches in God's kingdom.

So let's guard ourselves against all greed so that we can trust God more. Let's be contented and generous so that we're storing eternal treasures.

Let's do it because Jesus promises we wouldn't regret it. Let's pray. Father we thank you for the riches that you have poured into our lives through the gift of Jesus and his death for us on the cross.

Help us to grow in faith toward you, to store up eternal treasures, to live contentedly knowing that you will provide for us and to practice generosity because you have been so generous to us.

[24:45] Help us Lord we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.